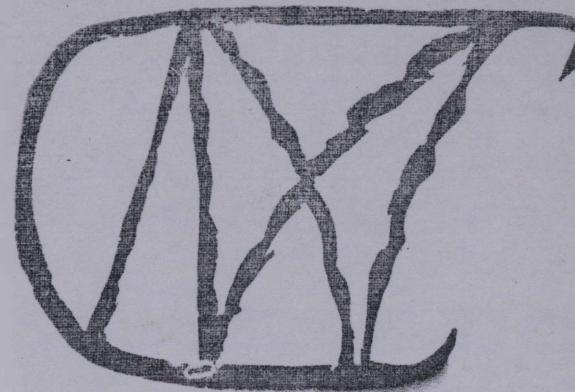


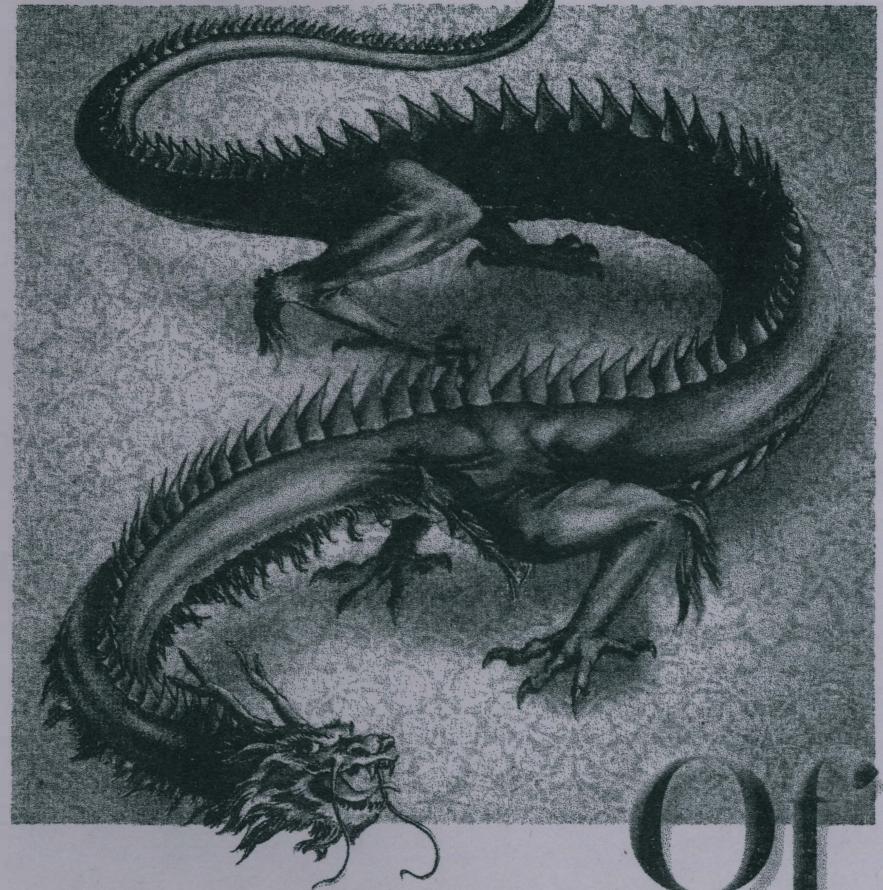
This wholesale demolition job on the myopic limitations of the animal rights movement originally appeared in the short-lived insurrectionary anarchist journal *A Murder of Crows: For Social War and the Subversion of Daily Life* in March 2007 and is more than deserving of wider circulation. “Animal rights” is a leitmotif of activist/reformist demagogic; a muddled, mystifying notion with no grasp of the Social Totality—a cold reservoir that absorbs and neutralizes non-reified revolt into its half-dead system of morality and radical liberalism. This important essay calls out the animal rights movement for the abyss of recuperation that it is (one that redirects and absorbs non-ideological rebellion) and suggests forms of uncontrollable insurgency in opposition to its homogenous and abstract model of incremental “change”.

Enemy Combatant Publications



Hibernia, Ohio

The Harvest



Of Dead Elephants

The False Opposition of Animal Liberation

Recommended Reading:

Animal Liberation: Devastate to Liberate or Devastatingly Liberal?

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

Rejecting the Reification of Revolt by Jason McGuinn

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

Anarchy and Leftism: A Marriage Made in Mental Illness

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

The Harvest Of Dead Elephants

The False Opposition of Animal Liberation

by Aden Marcos

Some would say that something must be done. The world is getting worse and we must act. They would tell us that we must do things that make us feel like we can change things. Why, then, not work for animal liberation? If our action is an expression of our desire, there is little hope in counting converted vegans or numbers of liberated hens. Revolution is first and foremost a transformation of our interactions in the world — qualitative social transformation, not quantified activist victories. We must spit on appeals to those in power and act directly for what we want. Revolution must be a daily practice if we are to have any actual potential.

Something must be done. But we need fire as much as we need ideas. To affect any kind of real revolutionary social change, social relations must go beyond adherence to ideologues and their false oppositions, beyond the stratified decision-making, beyond pious proclamations. We want something radically different, a world where we can be free to choose how to live. This is only possible if we act outside of the social role of activist or consumer, without political parties and their hollow proclamations or nonprofit organizations and their single-issue campaigns. We must be liberators of ourselves, not slaves to causes driven by religious fervor and ideological blindness.

This critique made of the animal liberation movement should be equally applied against all false oppositions and causes — and there are many. We are not seeking converts to adopt our perspective. We are not asking anyone to neglect the exploitation of animals or simply start eating meat. Rather, we wish to foster greater critical thinking and analytical discussions of our own daily actions as well as the theories and practices of social movements.

In order to free ourselves from our shit-shoveling and shit-eating, we must become active participants in an insurgency against ideology, morality, capitalism, and the stranglehold of the state. In a word, we must destroy everything that dominates us because the world is evermore becoming a giant fucking prison. The misery of the factory farm and the vivisection lab is everywhere. So, too, are our targets. We will have to destroy the relations that reproduce and allow this society to exist and begin a disobedience and refusal that is neither civil nor blinded.

As some dead guerilla once said: destroy what destroys you. This world will unravel under the unleashing of our desires. For us, destructive rebellion against this shit society is the only thing that holds any promise of liberation. We do not want bigger cages. We want to destroy all of them entirely.

It is not only the animals who depend on us to set them free from this world. It is we who must ultimately feel the wind of freedom on our faces.

Direct Action not Ideology

Animal liberation has the most potential as a direct act rather than an ideology. Liberations of animals violate their status as property. Sabotage and destruction of animal industries can be directed against the commodification of animals. However, when these actions are done with the ultimate goal of animal liberation, they remain confined to a perspective that cares only for animals. For example, many vivisection lab raid communiqués focus solely on the oppression of animals, usually in moralistic or ideological terms, while ignoring all the other exploitative and disgusting aspects of the university research lab or pharmaceutical company. Instead of breaking down boundaries to understanding social domination, actions like these erect them and promote limited perspectives that don't take into account the underlying causes that turn animals into commodities. Likewise, the potential of these actions is stunted by their confinement to a single issue instead of being an act of solidarity linked to other social struggles. There are, however, some notable exceptions of people liberating animals and sabotaging animal exploitation operations without claiming their actions for animal liberation. These should not go without notice as they are positive because they do not demarcate themselves as relevant to only one aspect of domination but rather are attacks on one of many forms. If we see domination and exploitation everywhere, we must not limit ourselves; we must attack it everywhere it is found.

Against Activism, Towards Active Insurgency

What we are and what we want begins with a no. From it is born the only reason for getting up in the morning. From it is born the only reason for going armed to the assault on an order that is suffocating us.

– Anonymous, “At Daggers Drawn”

The prison that is this society must be destroyed if we care to talk about freedom. The factory farm is but one location where we find its misery. This system of exploitation profits from animal and human sweat and blood. It is our common enemy. We will not change anything by asking the rulers to make misery more bearable or to exploit us, but with better wages and bigger cages. Our lives and our relations in the world must be decided on our own terms. To do this, we have a difficult task ahead. Let's not grow full on false promises, moral codes, and blinding ideologies. Let's grow strong on sharp ideas and self-determined action.

*I never met anybody who said when they were a kid,
‘I wanna grow up and be a critic.’*

– Richard Pryor

We believe there are some who take action under animal liberation's very broad banner that are just as concerned as we are with completely transforming this society based on exploitation and misery. However, we find many within radical and anarchist circles uncritically embracing animal liberation philosophy and veganism. These ideas have maintained an inertia and perpetuance that have unfortunately met little challenge, especially in North America. We hope this critique will provide some starting points toward greater critical thought and theoretical reflection, tools that will be required of us if we are to take effective action against domination and exploitation.

Animal Liberation: A Brief Overview

The animal liberation movement developed and radicalized in the 1970s in Britain, and to a lesser extent, in the US. Its philosophy grew out of, and often overlaps with, animal rights, which claims that all animals are entitled to possess their own lives, should possess moral rights, and that some rights for animals ought to be put into law, such as the right to not be confined, harmed, or killed.

Peter Singer is one of the ideological founders of the animal liberation movement. His approach to an animal's moral status is not based on the concept of rights, but on the utilitarian principle of equal consideration of interests. In his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), he argues that humans should grant moral consideration to other animals not based on intelligence, their ability to moralize, or on any other human attribute, but rather on their ability to experience suffering. The animal liberation ideology maintains that humans can make moral choices that animals cannot, and therefore humans must choose to avoid causing suffering.

Since animal rights and animal liberation's philosophical beginnings, many animal liberation groups have sprung up worldwide, each with differing approaches but all working for the same fundamental goal. Likewise, veganism, the lifestyle of not consuming or using any animal products, nor products tested on animals, has become ever more popular. My intention is not to be comprehensive here. Anyone interested in learning the particulars of the animal liberation movement can find an abundance of books and websites with more information.

Manipulations, Representations, and Abstractions

Animal liberation is...a war. A long, hard, bloody war in which all the countless millions of its victims have been on one side only, have been defenseless and innocent, whose one tragedy was to be born nonhuman.

– Robin Webb, British ALF Press Officer

...the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived...

– Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle

To begin a critique of anything, we must understand how its advocates represent it. The animal liberation movement first and foremost appeals to various uncritically-embraced clichés that are abundant within activist movements, as well as throughout society in general.

Concepts of niceness, compassion, and philanthropy, all socialized into us as being civil, responsible, and good, are played upon in the language of the animal liberationist. Animal liberation presents itself as a moral and civil progression of human society, a process of “widening our circle of compassion.” We are told that humans can and should avoid causing pain and suffering for animals, and that by doing so, humanity will be on the right path to a kinder and more peaceful world.

This focus on suffering and the supposed necessity of its elimination is highly problematic. Under capitalism, animals are used as commodities—as objects whose sole purpose is to be bought and sold—and as objects entirely, that are counted, commercialized, and price-tagged. However, animal liberationists reduce all of these things to one broad categorization: suffering. This reduction eliminates the intricacies and specifics of how animals are used within the current social context and flattens the nature of their exploitation. What is paramount to animal liberationists is the amount of pain caused to animals and the number of animals killed. This generally leads to ridiculous oversimplifications about anyone or anything that kills animals. Hunters are bad because they kill animals, just like factory farms, and just like abusive pet owners; to animal liberationists it’s only a matter of scale. Their focus is simply on ending suffering—a complete absurdity in itself.

You Can't Legislate Freedom

You would have to be mad to expect protection from the State... And I am not a fool.

– Andrea Dorea, “N’Drea”

The animal liberation movement believes animals should be given legal rights and protections. They applaud bans on cock fighting, a truly insignificant institution in the grand scheme of animal abuses, just because it is seen as helping animals and adding to their number of supposed victories. However they criticize laws that protect businesses that use animals. They accept the state’s rationale for why laws exist in the first place and ignore that the legal system regulates society, making it efficient, orderly, and controlled. Laws validate social control, outlawing the ungovernable and protecting the powerful. Laws and their enforcers hope to keep us from tearing the factory farm apart with our own hands.

The state protects animal industries and other capitalist ventures; it is the backbone and brute force of the capitalist system. The law criminalizes anyone who would oppose the smooth functioning of capitalism. Legal codes preserve capitalist social relations; the concept of property and its ownership are thus sanctified. Any appeal for additional laws merely strengthens the power of the legal system and its mythology of justice and fairness. Faith in the law is faith in capitalist exploitation, enforced by cops, bureaucrats, judges, and legislators. They have no interest in changing a social order they reap benefits from. Passing a law banning animal cruelty here, or a law against animals in circuses there, changes very little despite some claiming it as a victory. The factories of production continue to run more and more animals through their mills. Misery continues and the state’s legal apparatus ensures it is so.

If we are to take animals out of the degrading system of production, we will have to reject any supposed remedies provided by the electoral and legal mechanisms of the state. The legal system only remedies the problems of those in power. Anyone who opposes the social order will be opposed in law. The ALF at least knows this much. We’re better off destroying the entire scheme of alienated political power instead of asking for more stale crumbs and empty concessions. If we oppose capitalism for what it does to animals, we should also entirely oppose the states that ensure this system continues enslaving the world to its logic.

Angels of Mercy: In Love with Heros, Martyrs, and Militants

To those who have lost their lives fighting animal abuse and to those who took their own lives when the horrors became too much to bear; to those who gave their freedom... Thank you.

– Robin Webb, British ALF Press Officer

Many animal liberationists love the martyrdom of the ALF. They are revered as selfless and brave, victims of caring too much and suffering for their compassion much like Mother Teresa and Jesus. One representation of this can be found in Ingrid Newkirk's book, *Free The Animals*, which tells the story of a group of people who break laws and risk imprisonment in order to save animals from vivisection labs. This book has been a popular story among animal activists since the 1980s. Its appeal lies in its portrayal of people who are somehow better than the rest of us — more noble, brave, and compassionate. Like a character from a simplistic storybook tale, the ALF warrior risks all to save animals from evil. The animal liberation movement relishes its heroes in the same way the media does, reinforcing leader-and-follower social relations.

Yet many avoid illegal direct action because of the consequences of breaking the law. The risk of personal repercussion then strengthens the myth of the warrior's sacrifice. Breaking the law becomes a task for super humans, not the rest of us. ALF members appear to have been born with special abilities and a fearlessness that we do not possess. On pedestals, they sit like idols for worship. They are the heroes of the animal liberation movement. Below them are people who can only applaud like the spectator applauds a piece of art, which only someone supposedly gifted or extraordinary can produce.

Social transformation needs no martyrs, heroes, or militants. Revolutionary action must include a conscious effort to subvert the roles that define our exclusion and powerlessness. The sooner we throw hero worship and martyrdom into the fire, the sooner we can struggle for our own freedom. Revolution begins with each one of us. We are the executioners of fate. We must decide our own future so that no one else will be able to.

Let's make no mistake, animals feel pain, and anyone who argues the opposite is a fool. But just the same, anyone who argues that pain and suffering can be ended is equally as foolish. Pain is an inseparable part of life. Animals can starve to death in the wild, break their bones, or be torn from limb to limb by other animals. Pain, then, is a biological indicator of danger, injury, and disease. It happens to animals without any human influence. Still, animal liberations represent animal pain and death as consequences of the supposed human moral backwater in which animals have always been used and dominated because we have not given them equal consideration; we have not progressed. So animal liberationists embrace a contradictory and dangerous proposition that pain and suffering, at least for animals, can be ended, either entirely or as it is caused by human agency. Yet the idea of ending suffering is as silly as if one wanted to end sadness and went around trying to make people laugh. It would be an exercise in futility. We are intimately connected in a cycle of life and death that, by necessity, involves pain and suffering, just as it involves sadness and joy. Yet they tell us if only we do not turn a blind eye, we would be convinced of their cause. Horrifying images of blood and death in factory farms and brutalization in vivisection labs are abundant in animal liberation propaganda. These images, like the ones we are shocked with by the news media, are used to represent and exploit misery. While the media shocks and normalizes us to images of global misery, the animal liberation movement represents misery in order to manipulate and guilt us into wholly embracing their perspective. It is not uncommon to hear animal liberationists compare animal exploitation to the holocaust, while also implying that what animals go through is actually far worse than anything humans experience. This analogy plays on our sympathies while quantifying the suffering of animals and attempting to convince us with the sheer weight of numbers. Pain and death are abstracted and measured, represented in a way that serves ideological promotion. If we do not care about the millions of animals that die every year, then we are cruel and uncaring. If we do not care, then we are responsible.

Animal liberation does not provide us with any critical assessment of social domination. It promises liberation while actually confining most everything to the quantified logic found throughout society. The abstracted language and manipulative imagery of the animal liberation movement is indicative of its wider logic, and ultimately, of one of its major weaknesses. Measuring the misery of the slaughterhouse or the vivisection lab is an appeal based on a certain number of capitalist horrors. The horrors inflicted on animals are elevated over any others by continually pointing to body counts and units of measured suffering. Yet misery and exploitation cannot be measured; they are not made worse by how often or how many experience it. We relate to it concretely because we experience it every day, and we see it experienced throughout the world.

Few of us would react indifferently to the carnage of the slaughterhouse floor. Our society treats animals as it does humans or trees or genes. All are treated as units of economic value, processed as efficiently as possible and then turned into marketable commodities. But our disgust does not come from any fantasy about the end of suffering. We seek the revolutionary destruction of this society of exploitation. We hate the degradation and misery of everything being turned into objects for sale, valued according to the capitalist dictates of the modern world. We want to decide our own lives and relations, outside of the market. It is from this perspective that we analyze exploitation and enslavement as a condition of social domination — a condition that can be transformed. It is also from this perspective that we critique animal liberation and its dubious promises.

This, That, and the Same: The Contradictions of Cruelty-Free Consumerism

Welcome, shoppers! Thank you for being a caring consumer! By purchasing only cruelty-free products, you can help save rabbits, mice, guinea pigs, rats, and other animals.

– from PETA's Caring Consumer website

The animal liberation movement seeks to reform current social conditions, in part, by promoting “cruelty-free” and “compassionate” consumerism. By advocating this type of economic consumption, they claim that animal suffering will be reduced. The logic goes that not using or consuming an animal means that no animal will be harmed or killed. This idea of consumer reform is based on the belief that the system is faulty, unnecessarily cruel, and merely needs to be fixed. This movement is evidently not opposed to capitalism itself, regardless of what some may claim. The reality, however, is that misery is an inevitable consequence of capitalist consumption and production. Everything we buy is an object and commodity — quantified, reduced, and valued solely in terms of its role in the economy. Misery is just another by-product, like pollution, that has no economic value and thus is dispensed freely.

The cult of veganism is effective in encapsulating the false reasoning of consumer reform. The contradictions of the vegan ethic become painfully apparent when we look at the origins of all products and commodities in our society. A pound of tofu or a bottle of cruelty-free shampoo hides behind the superficiality of its claim. The claim that vegan products have not contributed

or destroys the property of animal industries without any life being harmed in the process. Their short-term aim is to save as great a quantity of animals as possible, and their long-term goal is to “end animal suffering” by putting animal industries out of business. Evidently, the ALF represents the same ideological and quantified thinking as the rest of the animal liberation movement.

The allure of the ALF is in part due to their commando-style image of breaking laws in the cover of night. Popular ALF images have an angelic quality to them. They save innocence from evil, just like the boring fairy tale themes we are force-fed as children. From the point of view of animal liberationists, direct action, while practical for liberating animals, is purely tactical rather than embraced as an ethic for how to interact in the world, outside of representation, and mediation. Law breaking of this sort is rationalized in much the same way Gandhi rationalized and validated breaking the law. This perspective adheres moralistically to non-violence and is carried out only with the intent of challenging laws that protect one aspect of social domination while leaving the rest untouched. Commonly, the ALF and its advocates compare the ALF to the Underground Railroad, the network of people that assisted slaves escaping from the South before chattel slavery was officially abolished in the US. This comparison is self-serving and reinforces hero worship — more illusions of grandeur.

The Justice Department (JD) and the Animal Rights Militia (ARM), on the other hand, play into a more militant pro-violence stance. While these groups are much less prolific than the ALF, it is worth noting their development within the animal liberation movement. ARM is known for beating up hunters in England, and JD is known for mailing razor blades to fur farmers and making threats against vivisectors. Instead of glorifying non-violence like the ALF does, these groups glorify its opposing tactical form: violence. Here develops a tactical ideology still trapped within its own tunnel vision. They counterpose themselves to non-violence, which is seen as a failed method that doesn’t “get results” quickly enough, quantifying social change in itself. They see themselves as taking things “a step further.” This is the same reasoning that groups such as the Black Liberation Army and the Weather Underground used, culminating in spectacular acts that did nothing to diminish anyone’s exploitation and instead glorified political violence. Their approach demonstrates the frustration and powerlessness of “radical” action that is divorced from everyday revolutionary practice. Rather than seeking a qualitative break with a society based upon roles and specialists, these groups reinforce the instrumentality of individuals dedicated to ideologies, not the actual transformation of life for those involved.

In terms of actual practice, animal liberation activists seek successful reform campaigns rather than a widespread challenge to the system as a whole. They are keen on celebrating their self-proclaimed victories. One fur farm closes. A vivisection lab goes out of business. But later, the fur farm comes back in another place with a different owner when the fashion industry successfully markets Fur again. Production starts up again just as it always does. And the cosmetics industry still needs to pour chemicals in rabbits' eyes and inject rats with pharmaceuticals in order to prevent potential lawsuits. So another vivisection lab opens overseas or an existing one increases its business, ultimately leading to more animals being brutalized and killed. The "Road to Victory" that many radical animal activists celebrate is a series of insignificant concessions doled out by the system. Capitalism is flexible enough to reform as long as its overall function is not impeded. And as long as its overall function is not impeded, animals will continue to be commodified and exploited. Let's now take a closer look at the dynamics and practice of this movement.

Lost in the Fog of War: A Look at the Animal Liberation Movement

"Radical" Animal Liberationists

There are many activist campaigns that pride themselves on being radical and grassroots. Radicalism by itself is merely an oppositional term used to contrast some method with another. It is ambiguous and certainly does not position a "radical" as having any clear perspective other than being extreme in his or her tactics. There are many who are attracted to the allure of radicalism because it presents itself as an alternative to the reformist tendencies of other groups. This representation is a falsity. The animal liberation movement embraces reform wholly despite some presenting it as radical merely because of the tactics it employs. PETA and SHAC want mostly the same things. They just use different tactics and strategies to achieve the same goals. But "radical" tactics should not be confused with radical goals. Social transformation is not made merely through broken windows and home demos. Departing radically from what exists requires deconstructing "radicalism" and not confusing tactics for philosophy.

Animal Commandos

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has garnered much support throughout the years for its commando-style tactics of live liberations, sabotage, and fire bombings. These ALF cells are made up of small, decentralized groups of vegetarian or vegan people who carry out actions under certain guidelines; for example, an action can be claimed by the ALF if it either liberates animals

directly to the killing of animals is one of many marketed illusions promoted by companies profiting off this niche market. Capitalist production, driven by mass consumption, requires an enormous quantity of resources. These resources are extracted from the earth through the cheapest and most destructive processes possible, contributing to massive amounts of animal habitat destruction and animal killing. The brutal reality of production is buried beneath the glitter of the marketplace.

Simply look at how production works. The manufacture of plastics is based on oil, so the packaging used for vegan products entails the usual pollution and "accidents" of the oil industry. Industrial oil spills in the ocean account for an estimated average 100 million gallons a year. Only an estimated 5% of this is from large tanker spills such as the infamous Exxon Valdez disaster. The other larger portion is comprised of routine spillage from the normal operations of oil transportation and extraction. Oil spills damage bird-nesting sites, coat beach habitats in sludge, and poison and directly kill fish, birds, and other marine life. Pipeline construction destroys wildlife habitat. Oil refineries spew pollution into waterways, poisoning animals and destroying their breeding sites. This says nothing of the resource wars for oil that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and continue to, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa, as well as destroyed the ecological integrity of those regions.

The fact is, organic soybeans used for tofu, tempeh, and fake meats, just like any other product in the store, use the same industrial distribution system that consumes enormous amounts of oil and other resources to package, store, transport, and distribute food and non-food commodities the world over. This translates into mountainsides and rivers destroyed from mining fossil fuels, forests cleared for packaging materials, chemical pollution from the manufacture of inks, adhesives and lubricants, and so on and so forth. All these industrial processes poison animals and destroy their habitats. The capitalist economy will do nothing to avoid this massive destruction because these precautions would increase the cost of production and decrease profit. This is to say nothing of the fact that capitalist consumption is dependent upon an unrestrained acceleration of resource consumption and ecological destruction to feed its growth. Capitalism must expand or die. Through its expansion, the world must die.

Veganism presents a false alternative to capitalist misery. It doesn't and won't ever change things for the animals or for us human beings. Capitalism defines the condition of our suffering and dictates how we will live, and ultimately how we cannot. The production processes that go into making vegan products are the same as those used for any products on the market today. Mass production is part of a global division of labor that exploits millions and millions of people worldwide. Resources don't turn into commodities by themselves. People produce them. They are exploited in order to power the

economy, to turn its gears and make it function. It's no surprise then that capitalists treat both animals and humans as dispensable objects. Yet the animal liberation movement would argue for the destruction or abolition of factory farms and butcher shops but put animal-free workhouses in their place. This ignores the human suffering that wage work causes by destroying bodies and dulling minds. We humans may not be raised and killed for food production like other animals, but we are definitely raised and killed for production just the same. The morning commute, debt and rent, the fatigue, the boredom and the dissatisfaction — all these will still exist in society that sells only vegan products. There is no cruelty-free capitalism, just capital for capitalists. The economy runs the show, taking what it needs and destroying the rest.

To counter capitalist misery we must counter it as a whole and reject the illusion of piecemeal half-measures and consumer-reform campaigns. More importantly, a coherent analysis of social domination requires an unflinching critique of the moral and ideological forces that seek to prevent this very analysis.

Damned if You Do: Morality's Mind-Hold Trap

His Holiness is pleased at being called upon... to eradicate from the hearts of men barbarous and cruel tendencies.

– Pope Pius X

Morality is herd instinct in the individual.

– Friedrich Nietzsche

Morality is a system of rules, a set of rigid codes based on an “objective” right and wrong, which in turn are based on conceptions of good and evil. These codes supposedly apply in all places and at all times. That which is considered “right” or “wrong” under a moral code is not simply the correct or incorrect action for one person in a specific time, place, or culture, but is rather the correct or incorrect action for all people in all places, at all times. Moralists claim that their strictures are universal standards by which their actions and the actions of others should be judged. Thus morals themselves are authoritarian because we must conform to them regardless of our own will.

recruiting members to their cause. This is problematic from a revolutionary perspective, which is concerned with transforming current social relations instead of reproducing them.

The animal liberation movement reproduces the activist role by standing above and outside the realm of struggles that are inclusive and relevant to the exploited. Animal activism dedicates itself to specific causes and excludes those who do not adhere to its codes of morality and lifestyle. Likewise, it glorifies self-sacrifice, an idea that is absolutely detrimental to liberation of any kind. Activists see sacrifice and suffering as some sort of skill most people are incapable of. The activist must change society for others, for the supposed benefit of others. The masses must be educated and shown the importance of a cause or an issue. The animal liberation movement would make every human a vegan, regardless of how little it will actually help anyone determine the conditions of their lives. The worker trying to support a family will find very little inspiration in a vegetarian diet if it does nothing to change the economic noose tied around his or her own life. A vegan diet does not make dissatisfaction any more palatable.

This is not the only reason why many people do not take animal liberation very seriously. The animal activist subculture limits interaction amongst non-activist people and obstructs an understanding of the struggles of others. Subcultures, activist or not, create divisions and obstacles between the exploited. They require others to adhere to their codes of thinking, conduct, and fashion, ultimately alienating themselves from the possibility of building affinity and solidarity with others. Who wants to constantly be told what to do, how to think, and what to wear? An activist group can isolate itself from this world, but they shouldn't expect that anyone else wants to share in their self-imposed isolation.

Some activists may see this isolation as another selfless sacrifice for the greater good. One must sacrifice for someone else, some animal, some abstraction, some issue or some cause. In the process, one does not act out of their own interests but the interests of someone or something else. You can get the shit beaten out of you at a demonstration or go to prison for liberating animals. The activist will claim that these are necessary sacrifices for just causes and that your personal suffering will lead to less suffering for others. This is the myth of the martyr represented in action. Suffering is not alleviated by causing more suffering for one's self. Modern life is already perpetuated by sacrifice — at work, in school, under capitalism. That is not to say we should see something that sickens us and become passive and avoid risks. Rather, we should take action because we want to and not because we feel we have to. Then the risk we take is the risk of living our lives, not sacrificing for an idea. After all, Jesus already died for our sins. Let's not follow in the footsteps of that fool and die for them as well.

The various institutions that comprise society govern our actions within it. We are not mere individuals doing whatever we want. We have very few choices as to how we survive, all of which are governed by buying the products of exploitation and being exploited ourselves to make them. We are continually taught to accept this life, much like prisoners are conditioned into accepting their cells. Misanthropy does not explain or illuminate hierarchical and exploitative social relationships. It is merely a lazy ideological excuse for not thinking critically about the problems we are presented with.

Attacking the capitalist system and its consequences requires us to understand and act against it as a systematic whole. Otherwise, the opposition will take the form it usually does, playing into the ideology of reform and radicalism without any critical theory applied to how and what we must attack. Ideology makes sheep out of people. Because we are told, or we tell ourselves, we are free does not mean we are actually so. We will have to be critical of all theory, ideology, and practices if we are to determine how useful they are in transforming, or better yet, destroying this society of exploitation.

Just Do It: The Activist

I firmly believe that our focus must be on ending the suffering and the death as quickly and efficiently as possible. If we all do as much as we can, the 21st century WILL be the one to usher in animal liberation.

—Anonymous

The supposedly revolutionary activity of the activist is a dull and sterile routine — a constant repetition of a few actions with no potential for change.

—Andrew X., “Give Up Activism”

Activists play a specific role in our society. They are the specialists in social change much like artists are the specialists in culture. This specialization separates one group of people from the rest of society. This condition is not accidental, as it is in the nature of specialization to be exclusive. The activist manages and represents social struggles, confining them to single issues and

Morals come from some authority above us. This authority could be god, the state, the family, or various reified ideas or entities that validate the supposed objectiveness of a particular morality. Moral codes define and direct the choices one makes. They must not be violated because they are absolute and inflexible. In this way, decisions are not based upon what one feels is appropriate to one's situation or desires in the world, but rather one's decisions are predetermined by a moral system. While many moralists occasionally break out of their shackles, there is a sense of shame and guilt because they have broken rules they believe are righteous and good. Thus morality is antithetical to anyone seeking to think and interact in the world in ways that reflect his or her desires.

Likewise, moral arguments are not based upon critical theoretical thinking. Moral arguments or claims can simply be refuted by opposing moral claims. If eating animals is wrong to a vegetarian, to a meat eater it is not. Assertions of right and wrong can go on and on until one's mouth is tired and one's tongue is dry. However, morality is relative to the culture from which it evolves. Notions of right and wrong are determined by society, and particularly by those who control society. Anyone who says that tribal hunter-gatherers are murderers because they eat meat is merely entrenched in their own arrogant moral judgments. It is precisely this lack of critical thought that places barriers between recognition of common interests among people.

Some animal liberationists, full of righteous indignation, will tell someone who eats meat how evil their food is. These indifferent or apathetic meat eaters must be told that they participate in the murder of innocent beings. If they do not listen, they are guilty. If they listen but do not act, they are guiltier still. The black and white shadows of morality cast themselves down like a judge's gavel. Campaigns to “educate” people about animal cruelty or veganism are carried out like missionary projects. Pious condemnations of other people's failures to commit to “ending suffering” are much like the preacher on his pulpit, chastising those who have yet to rid themselves of their sins. This guilt just makes people feel like shit for their already powerless position in society, limited by the choices that capitalism imposes upon us. It does not foster a critical assessment of the social conditions that contribute to animal exploitation, but rather encourages blind obedience to predetermined rights and wrongs.

Various social institutions — religion, school, work, and the family — impart moral obedience in us in order to regulate our actions and thoughts internally and reinforce various institutions of social domination. Morality is the cop in our heads, a shackle on individual and collective realization, and an impediment to anyone who wishes to freely determine her or his life. When we begin to decide for ourselves what we want and how we will live, and allow others to do so as well, we'll make great strides in freeing ourselves from prisons unseen.

Ideology, Reliable Shackles

Because ideology is always the form taken by alienation in the realm of thought, the more alienated we are, the less we understand our real situations... And the less we assert our own autonomous existence, the more palpable an existence is taken on by capitalism, by the frozen images of our roles in all the various social hierarchies and transactions of commodity exchange.

— Lev Chernyi, “An Introduction to Critical Theory”

Ideology works similarly to morality. Rather than adhering to the rules of objective truths, of right and wrong, one adopts the rigid programs and perspectives inherent or implied in an idea or concept. There is no room for any flexibility. Ideology encompasses an aspect of life entirely and governs our relation to it. In this way, ideological thinking is used in place of critical thinking. The world, or aspects of the world, are explained and understood through the filter of ideology. For example, democratic ideology upholds the idea of social change through voting, political representation, and legislation. It promotes faith in formal politics as much as it prevents autonomous direct action. The power of this ideology, like all ideology, lies in how it conforms and directs one’s thinking into limited possibilities and perspectives. Ideology stands counter to a critical theoretical analysis that can assess situations and ideas based upon their actual usefulness to our practice and approach.

Animal liberation does not fall outside of this; it is ideological at its foundation. It subsumes everything under animal issues. The exploitation of people and the destruction of the environment may still be important to the animal activist but they are seen as separate issues. Ideology makes one incapable of seeing or understanding things outside of it in any coherent way. Everything is framed by how it relates to an animal issue. A vivisection lab is merely a place of animal torture, neglecting the harm of pharmaceutical tests on humans, the millions made in profits, and the unquestioned advance of technology. A meat packer slices animals into pieces all day. We hate what is done to the animals as they bleed in lines, in rows, on hooks. But animal liberation ideology does not allow for the same consideration of the human worker who must endure the dangers and injuries of this tofu plant or that soymilk factory. Their degradation as replaceable cogs within the system of production is not viewed as deserving of equal consideration since animal and human are seen as separate categories, the former placed above the latter.

Veganism clearly demonstrates the all-encompassing power of ideology. Some vegans care little about how well they eat as long as they never consume any animal products. So eating like shit (e.g. highly-processed, chemical-laden, vegan junk food) and destroying one’s body is acceptable as long as it’s vegan. It’s okay to destroy your health because it does not destroy an animal’s — an illusion in its own right. So everything becomes an issue of the animals’ interests, blocking out all other factors. The absoluteness of maintaining a vegan lifestyle takes priority over all other concerns and maintains the illusion that vegan consumption does not contribute to animal suffering. It blinds people to the reality of what they consume, allowing one to comfortably embrace its premises without critically evaluating them.

Animal liberation and veganism must be framed in a social context in order for us to understand them in scale and scope. Animal liberation ideology and the vegan lifestyle that springs from it are fragmentary oppositions that fully adopt the capitalist system’s way of conceptualizing change. They embrace the idea that one’s consumer choices are primary in not only determining one’s identity, but also as a way of creating change. The promises of “cruelty-free” veganism promote an abstracted view of social change focused on “saving” numbers of animals through consumerism. This false opposition challenges one aspect of domination while doing nothing to destroy its systematic causes, in this case, the rule of capitalism.

Some vegans argue that their lifestyle choices are better than nothing, in the same way some argue that Democrats are better than Republicans. This is part of veganism’s fragmentary understanding of the social order, which focuses its tunnel vision solely on “reducing animal suffering.” All the while, animals are still being made into meat machines, processed by people who are forced to work as labor machines — both traded around in monetary terms, exploited, and used for capital’s ends. Capitalism defines human and animal roles within society while veganism merely obscures this relationship by promoting illusory “compassionate” consumerism.

A related ideology, popular among radical animal activists, green anarchists, and environmental activists, blames the harm done to animals and the earth on all humans and specifically on human nature. This is thinly-veiled misanthropy. Animal liberationists elevate the condition of animals because they are seen as defenseless, peaceful, and innocent, whereas humans are seen as lacking these qualities. A misanthrope would say some or all humans are inherently bad, cruel and uncaring, or even that many humans love to kill, torture and hurt. They would say this is human nature. But these acts aren’t a product of our nature; we are not governed by instinct or an abstracted idea of human nature. Nor does human history give credence to the notion that human beings are inherently cruel and destructive. This mess of imposed misery and domination is a product of human society, not of a human nature that must be repressed or made moral.